



The Compost Bin

October 2016

**A Publication of the Travis County Master Gardeners
a volunteer program of Texas A&M AgriLife Extension**

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Cover:
 Some cauliflowers, like this variety called ‘Amazing,’ are self-blanching. Their inner leaves wrap around the head to protect it from sunlight that may cause yellowing.
 By Bruce Leander

Right:
 Oxblood lillies after the rain.
 By Liath Appleton



Announcements

- **Master Gardener Meeting information:**
 Wednesday, Oct 5, 2016, starting at 7 pm
 Zilker Botanical Garden

- **Plant Exchange AFTER the October Meeting**
 It’s time for our fall plant exchange! Thanks to Sue King for the theme, which is the letter “P.” Do you have purple plants, or maybe petunias to share? Maybe you’d like to bring perennials or pollinators? Of course, other plants are welcome, except for invasives.
 Don’t forget to bring extra seeds, cuttings, garden magazines, pots and other garden related items.
 We do need help setting up and cleaning up, so plan to do your part. And please take home any of your extra plants.

- **TCMGA is in the process of selecting topics for the 2017 monthly TCMGA meetings.**
 Check your email for the link to the Survey. Make sure you complete the survey so your interests are represented! Thanks for helping design a program that has the most appeal for TCMGA volunteers.

Master Gardener meetings are open to certified Master Gardeners and trainees only.

In the Vegetable Garden

by Patty Leander

The joy of being outdoors returns with the long-awaited arrival of October's cooler temperatures. Winter won't be far behind, but there is no reason to go dormant in the vegetable garden ...just as okra laughs at our summer heat, collards, kale, and other winter greens laugh at our so-called winter weather. Plant these hearty greens now and you will be harvesting throughout the Christmas season. Leafy greens are quick to germinate and can be seeded directly in the garden in, loose, well-prepared soil. If you choose to set out transplants you can start harvesting small outer leaves a couple of weeks after planting in the garden.

Fall planting continues this month with transplants of cool season crops including broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, bok choy, kale, collards and Chinese cabbage. There is also time to plant another round of root vegetables such as beets, carrots and turnips. Be sure to thin your seedlings and give them room to develop a decent root. Generally a huge root is not the goal, but rather a root that isn't crowded, misshapen, or having to compete for water and nutrients. Beets and turnips should be thinned about 6" apart, radishes and carrots can be a little bit closer.

Remember that everything slows down a bit in the fall due to shorter day length and cooler temperatures. Add an extra week or two to maturity dates to account for the "fall factor" this time of year.

Here is the vegetable gardener's checklist for October:

- Lettuce can be planted from seed or transplants this month. Leafy types - romaine, butterhead, bibb and oakleaf varieties – do best in our growing conditions. Provide a little temporary shade for plants to get established.
- Plant spinach from seed or transplants. Soak seeds in cool water overnight for faster germination and plant after soil temperature has dropped below 75°.
- If you have the space sow another round of turnips, radishes, kohlrabi or beets – all of these vegetables are good candidates for a square foot garden, raised bed culture or container gardening. Look for varieties with variable "days-to-harvest" so they won't all mature at the same time.
- Use Swiss chard, purple mustard or curly kale as an ornamental to dress up flower beds or patio pots. Gather outer leaves around developing cauliflower and secure with string or a rubber band to preserve the white color.
- Protect plants from insect damage with lightweight row cover.
- Continue to feed vegetable plants every 2-3 weeks with water-soluble fertilizer.
- Inspect leafy plants regularly for aphids and treat as needed with insecticidal soap.



Plant root crops this month – most will mature in 30-70 days and all are tolerant of cold weather once established.

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...

- Control caterpillars with products containing Bt.
- Plant garlic before the end of the month. Softneck varieties are recommended for Texas - Artichoke or Silverskin types – but many gardeners grow hardneck garlic with some success. Softneck varieties to try include 'Red Toch,' 'Inchelium Red,' 'Lorz Italian' and 'California Early.' Local nurseries usually offer seed garlic or it can be purchased from mail order sources such as www.facebook.com/FilareeGarlicFarm, www.potatogarden.com and www.gourmetgarlicgardens.com. Work the soil and amend with compost and high nitrogen fertilizer two to three weeks before planting. Separate the bulb and plant each clove 4-6" apart and 2" deep with the pointy end up. Mulch well and be sure to water weekly in the absence of rain.
- Harvest pumpkins and other winter squash when the color is deep and uniform and the rind is hard. Cut from the vine leaving a few inches of stem attached to prevent entry by organisms that may cause decay.
- Harvest sweet potatoes this month. Dig carefully to avoid cuts or bruising that may invite decay. Cure for one week in a warm, humid spot. Cover with a damp piece of burlap to increase humidity.



Top right: grow your own spinach seedlings for transplanting throughout the cool season.

Bottom left: harvest densely planted lettuce at the baby leaf stage.

Bottom right: plant garlic, pointy end up, an inch or two below the soil surface.



Paper Wasps

by Wizzie Brown



Paper wasps are reddish brown, and may sometimes have yellow markings. They are about $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1 inch in length with smoky wings.

Paper wasps make a paper nest out of chewed wood fiber. The nest is open and hangs from a single filament. The nest is typically constructed in protected areas such as under the eaves of homes, in shrubbery, mailboxes or on fences.

Mated queens overwinter and emerge in spring to start a small, new nest in which to lay eggs. The colony, if left alone, grows in size throughout spring and summer. During this time workers forage mainly for protein, usually other insects, so they are great at helping to manage pests. Colonies reach their peak size in late summer to early fall. Starting in late summer, paper wasps forage on sugars and may be drawn to human inhabited areas that may contain a food source, such as garbage cans, outdoor patio areas or hummingbird feeders.

Paper wasps tend to be unaggressive, so if the nest is in an area where a stinging incidence is unlikely, it is best to leave it alone. If the nest is built in an area where someone may get stung, in a mailbox, on playground equipment, etc., then it is recommended to manage wasps and then remove the nest.

Early in the season, when nests are just being started by founding females, it may be possible to discourage paper wasps to nest in a certain area by knocking down the nest repeatedly. This is not recommended when the nest is larger and contains multiple wasps.

Aerosol formulations, both synthetic and naturally derived, are available for paper wasp management. The nest should be treated either in the early morning or late evening to ensure that wasps are not out foraging for food. Use caution when treating paper wasps nests. Not only are you using a pesticide, but you are dealing with insects that can sting repeatedly. After all wasps are gone, knock down the nest and throw it away. You may want to clean the area where the nest was hanging to rid the area of any pheromones that could quickly attract new wasps to the area.

For more information or help with identification, contact Wizzie Brown, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service Program Specialist at 512.854.9600. Check out my blog at www.urban-ipm.blogspot.com



Flashback Favs

by Daphne Richards

As a contributor to [Central Texas Gardener](#) (CTG), I love to answer your questions and share knowledge on new and tried and true plants for our area. Here are some gardening tips for this month.



Daphne and Augie. Daphne Richards is the county extension agent for horticulture at the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service office for Travis County

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1i2IP5fnSzI> (CTG 2012)

Can I use old shower curtains to solarize my yard?

Yes! Solarizing is a great way to deal with nematodes, weeds, and even get rid of turf grass. You simply cover an area with plastic, weight it down so that it doesn't blow away, and let the heat of the sun bake the area underneath. Nematodes are parasitic round worms that live in the soil and invade the roots of plants. Once you have them you can never truly be rid of them, but solarizing the soil does knock back the population pretty significantly. After replanting in a solarized area the nematodes will bounce back, so solarization is really most effective in vegetable beds where you can solarize the soil between planting seasons. To best keep the nematodes in check, you should solarize at least once a year, for at least a month (or longer if you have a really bad infestation) in early spring. Clear plastic works best here, since due to the greenhouse effect, the sun shines through to the soil and creates even more heat under the plastic. Solarizing also works well when trying to get rid of weeds and turfgrass, for example, if you're trying to remove the grass in order to put in a planting bed or other landscape element. In this situation it might be better to use black plastic so that you cut the plants off from sunlight, forcing them to use all of their stored carbohydrates to grow, but leaving them no way to photosynthesize and produce food to replenish the energy that they're using. Solarizing works very well on plants with underground storage organs like bulbs, rhizomes, and stolons that are very difficult to get rid of by pulling or even with herbicides. If you are trying to get rid of pernicious weeds, like nut sedge, or nut grass, as it's more commonly called, or Bermudagrass, solarizing multiple times will be necessary.

Damianita, *Chrysactinia mexicana*

This cute little mounding plant is what we in the biz would call a "sub-shrub." With its vibrant forest green leaves and its electrified yellow flowers, damianita seems almost like a plant out of a fairy tale; maybe something that Hansel and Gretel might pass on their way to the gingerbread house. It makes a striking addition to any garden bed, but looks best planted against starkly contrasting colors, such as pale rock mulch or decomposed granite. It is evergreen, but does require some shearing to keep it from getting too straggly in the heat. The foliage is strongly aromatic, but the plant stays so low to the ground that you may only be able to detect its scent after a rain. Damianita will only get about 12" tall, but may spread up to two feet. It loves the full sun and will not tolerate shade. It thrives in the heat and needs very little supplemental irrigation, except during the hottest, longest dry spells. Damianita is native to areas with very poor, rocky soils, so it won't do well in heavy clay or in areas that have been amended with organic matter. It flowers from spring all the way through fall and is

Fall Gardening in Central Texas

Continued...

listed as hardy to zero degrees, so it will also survive any uncharacteristically cold winters that we might get here in Central Texas.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lCbWESphw> (CTG 2012)

Is there any harm to my yard from dumping used cat litter in the grass, but NOT using it to fertilize a garden that is used to grow food?

Well, although tossing the kitty litter into the grass a couple of times probably wouldn't do much damage, I would advise against it, especially long-term, even in non-food areas of the yard. The small amount of cat waste in the litter is really not the issue, especially in non-edible beds, but the kitty litter itself would, in effect, become a soil amendment. Most of these products are either made from clay or silica. Clay is clumping, and does not easily break up in soil, so it would probably just stay on the soil surface as little balls. And if you have a heavy clay soil, you are already very familiar with the problems caused by having too much clay in the soil. Silica products would be less of an issue, since silica is basically coarse sand. And then there are the biodegradable products, which would, theoretically, break down over time, making them the least problematic in this situation. Unfortunately, I still think it's best to just go ahead and send used kitty litter to the landfill.

Bay laurel, *Laurus nobilis*

This beautiful evergreen shrub is indeed the same one of culinary fame. Although I wouldn't suggest planting one now (wait until spring), I couldn't resist highlighting bay laurel, in honor of the wonderful privacy hedge in this week's garden. Although native to the Mediterranean, bay laurel does very well in Central Texas landscapes. In its native habitat, bay laurel can get up to 40' tall, but here it will remain much shorter, closer to 4 or 5', and grow much more slowly. You can also hedge it back, to keep it manageable if it gets too tall. It also does great in a container. Since Mediterranean winters are not usually as cold as ours here, you may need to protect bay laurel on an extra cold night, especially during the first few years. But well-established trees should experience very little freeze damage, even with temperatures down into the teens, as long as those temps are not prolonged. Bay laurel prefers very rich, well-drained soil, so be sure to amend the planting area (not just the hole) with lots of compost. It requires full sun to thrive, but will struggle in areas with reflected heat and very dry air. You will need to water bay laurel regularly, but not more than once a week, once established, except in very hot, prolonged dry spells. Of course, since this is a culinary plant, you'll want to harvest some of the leaves, which you can do at any time of the year. Since bay laurel is so shrubby, it responds well to pruning, especially if it's healthy, and will put on new growth every time you harvest.

Fall Gardening in Central Texas

Continued...

THINGS TO DO IN OCTOBER

FERTILIZE: Fertilize existing beds of iris with well-rotted manure or balanced fertilizer. Reduce houseplant fertilizer by 1/2 for winter.

WATER: Water areas as needed.

TRANSPLANT: Divide and transplant crowded perennials. Dig and store caladlum bulbs. Dust with fungicide.

PREPARE SOIL: Mulch gingers and other tropicals that overwinter outdoors to retain warmth and moisture and to control weeds. Falling leaves make autumn a good time to start a compost pile. Shred (or mow) leaves to speed decomposition. Turn compost pile periodically and keep it moist.

LAWN CARE: Fertilize with 3-1-2 ratio fertilizer. In newly-plugged lawns, sow 8 lbs. of ryegrass per 1,000 sq. ft. to help hold soil. The seed grass will make a bright green carpet until spring, when hot weather will kill rye. Not recommended for established lawns. Mow every 5-7 days and leave the clippings on the lawn.

DISEASES/PESTS TO LOOK FOR: Check for cabbage loopers in the garden; spray with *Bacillus thuringiensis* (Bt). Make second treatment for brown patch on lawns with a history of the disease.

PRUNE: Prune shrubs as needed, but save major pruning for the winter. Remove dead and damaged wood from shrubs and trees. Make cuttings of tender plants before frost.

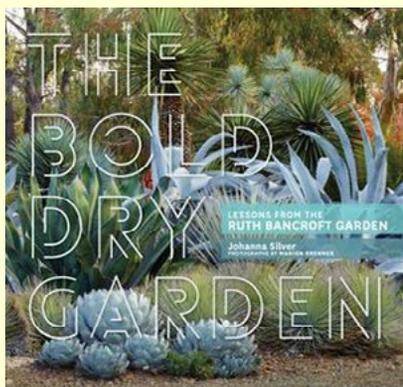


Weeds and Reads: A Gardener's Book Guide

by Liath Appleton

There's a lot of reading material out there, and new books are being published faster than anyone could ever possibly keep up! Hopefully these lists will help myself and others find fun and insightful new books to enjoy between the weeding and the watering.

October 2016:



The Bold Dry Garden: Create a Water-Saving Paradise with Lessons from the Ruth Bancroft Garden - October 5, 2016

by The Ruth Bancroft Garden, Johanna Silver, Marion Brenner (Photographs)

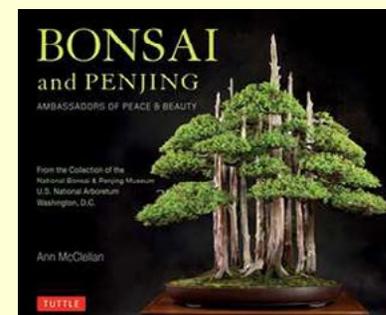
Ruth Bancroft is a dry gardening pioneer. Her lifelong love of plants led to the creation of one of the most acclaimed public gardens, The Ruth Bancroft Garden in Walnut Creek, California. The Bold Dry Garden offers unparalleled access to the garden and the extraordinary woman responsible for it. [\[more\]](#)

Bonsai and Penjing: Ambassadors of Peace & Beauty -

October 11, 2016

by Ann McClellan

This book tells the awe-inspiring stories of bonsai and penjing trees in the collection of the National Arboretum in Washington D.C. [\[more\]](#)



Trees: A Complete Guide to Their Biology and Structure - October 11, 2016

by A R Ennos

Trees are vital components of the landscape and have been exploited by humans since the beginning of our history. They cover huge areas of the globe, from the rainforests of the central tropics to the conifer forests of the subarctic, and from high up mountains right down to the seashore. [\[more\]](#)

Evolution Made to Order: Plant Breeding and Technological Innovation in Twentieth-Century America -

October 31, 2016

by Helen Anne Curry

In the mid-twentieth century, American plant breeders, frustrated by their dependence on natural variation in creating new crops and flowers, eagerly sought technologies that could extend human control over nature. [\[more\]](#)

Peckerwood Garden Tour & Antique Rose Emporium

by Erin Johnston

Hidden behind a low-key, gravel driveway and a faded sign lies Peckerwood Garden. Many of us who attended the Tour of Peckerwood passed the entrance without recognition. However, behind this unassuming facade lies a true wealth of rare and treasured plants.

About twenty-five master gardeners and guests climbed stiffly out of cars after a grueling drive toward Hempstead. Our tour guides immediately herded us toward some shade and introduced us to the greenhouse where they sell some of the rare plants cultivated within the gardens. The sun beat down on the brims of our hats as we gathered to learn more about this special niche of a garden.

Originally a privately owned garden, Peckerwood was transformed into a non-profit several years ago. The non-profit is supported by donations, mostly from Houston organizations. Three gardeners maintain the immaculate landscape, fighting against the areas prevalence for flooding and the native fauna. Many of the rare oaks growing within the grounds attract the wild hogs in the area. We did observe several instances of damage from their constant search for food.

Our tour guides were excited to be talking to gardeners from a different area. It was immediately apparent that most of their tours consist of Houston gardeners who are also fighting the heavy rains and clay-like soil conditions. As the tour started on a berm of Mexican imported oaks, many of us questioned the mounds throughout the garden. Even the smallest plants were raised upon a mound of dirt over a foot high. Our guide explained that keeping the feet dry for their trees and plants was a constant battle.

Questions such as "What's the water requirement for these?" and "Could it survive in a dry garden?" sometimes took our guides by surprise. Acknowledging our interests in some rarer plants that were possible adaptations to Austin climates, he led the group to a stunning palm cluster. Peeking behind their saw toothed leaves, we could see hints of plants much more familiar to us such as the Red Bird of Paradise. However, nestled beneath these familiar views were many surprises.

Boulder grass from the northeast part of Mexico showed it knobby, boulder-like root system above ground. Our guide was very knowledgeable about the history of these, such as when they were discovered, and had little stories about the people who set off on such adventures in 18th-century Mexico. Another favorite of our group was the Mexican Poisettia Oak Tree, *Quercus crassifolia*. It's brilliant new foliage emerges as red as a poinsettia, but then mellows to a dark green. The underside of its large leaves maintained an orangish tone and was extremely soft to the touch.

After the dry garden, we wandered through a pine forest with many different types of conifers. The understory plants excited many questions from our group. One of the stunners was the Japanese Blue Oak, *Quercus glauca*. Its dense shade elicited sighs of relief and oohs of awe. As an understory tree it was close to 30 feet tall. Our guide mentioned that if we planted it in full sun, it would top out around 15 feet. The tree close by was made into a guessing game. It was another dense shade tree and many people admired it. However, no one



Photo: Erin Johnston

In the Vegetable Garden

Continued...



Photo: Erin Johnston

guessed that it was a type of holly tree called *Ilex rotunda*. I suspect many of us will be searching for this tree in the near future. Its thick trunk and interesting branch structure would be perfect for kids playing and climbing, as well as a fall hammock stand.

Our group thanked our guides effusively and headed off to absorb some air conditioning in the quaint restaurant chosen for our lunch, Ayala Taqueria. We spread over several tables and talked, laughed and enjoyed our lunch.

After eating, most of us journeyed to the Antique Rose Emporium, which I, for one, had never taken the time to visit. A reed-filled stream meandered toward a thirsty cypress. Butterflies of every hue flitted from flower to flower. Rounds of roses filled every direction of the gaze. As we were quite spread out after lunch, the employees walked around helping us individually while we selected our treasures to take home. The ride home was surrounded by the intoxicating scent of roses.



Photo: Liath Appleton

Austin Area Events

Salado Yard and Garden Tour

Saturday, October 8, 2016
10am - 4pm

Salado, TX

The tour is self-paced and will feature eleven inspirational private and public properties with unique landscaping features, beautiful gardens, original sculpture and whimsical art, and more. Attendees will be able to discuss features and maintenance care with the homeowners of each property. Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists will serve as docents to provide additional information.

An added attraction to the tour includes book signings from two leaders in the architectural landscaping industry; Cheryl Beesley author of, *Landscaping with Edible Plants in Texas Design and Cultivation* and author, Judy Barrett who has penned multiple books including; *Recipes From And For The Garden* and *Yes, You Can Grow Roses*. Both will be at the Keep Salado Beautiful booth at the Christmas in October event on October 8th.

Details and tour tickets at www.keepsaladobeautiful.com. Cost is \$15. They may also be purchased in advance at the Salado Chamber of Commerce located at 813 N. Main Street. All proceeds from the tour go toward the Salado Sculpture Garden Improvement Project.

Chickens in Your Backyard

Thursday, October 13, 2016
10am - 12pm

Travis Co AgriLife Extension Service Office
1600 Smith Road
Austin, TX

Are you ready for the fun and rewarding experience of keeping your own backyard chickens? Learn about planning your coop, breed selection, caring for chicks, ideas to beat boredom, diets for delicious eggs and keeping the coop clean. Master Gardener Ally Stresing will help you get started with this informative talk on raising the home flock.

Backyard Basics, offered by Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Travis County, will provide consumers, backyard gardeners, homemakers, educators and farmers a "do-it-yourself" learning opportunity on tips for harvesting and preserving your garden produce, caring for bees and raising chickens for home egg production.

\$10 thru 10/3, \$15 starting 10/4 and onsite
NO cash accepted – checks and credit cards only. Space is limited so register on-line early to reserve your seat!
Register: <https://agriliferegister.tamu.edu/TravisCounty>
Register by Phone: 979-845-2604

Austin Area Events

Native Fall Plant Sale

Friday and Saturday, October 14-15, 2016

9am - 5pm

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center
4801 La Crosse Ave
Austin, TX

The Wildflower Center's Native Plant Sale will feature more than 300 species of unique Texas natives adapted to thrive in our crazy climate. Natives look beautiful in gardens and provide important habitat for pollinators and other wildlife. Our plant sale is a one-stop-shop for wildflower seeds, grasses, wetland plants for your pond, perennials, trees and shrubs.

Friday, Members Only Day

David Todd & Jonathan Ogren speak on their book, "The Texas Landscape Project" at noon, followed by signing until 2 p.m.
Pam Penick signs her new book, "The Water Saving Garden" from 1-3 p.m. in the Store.

Saturday, Public Day

Book signings from 1-4 p.m. in the Store:

Mary O. and Jeff Parker will sign "Explore Texas—A Nature Travel Guide."

Stephan Hatch, Kelly Umphres and Jenet Ardoin sign the new "Field Guide to Common Texas Grasses."

Charlie Llewellyn signs "60 Hikes Within 60 miles, San Antonio and Austin."

Details at www.wildflower.org/plantsale

TRAVIS COUNTY MASTER GARDENER ASSOCIATION

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This issue of the Compost Bin has been published thanks to the contributions of the following Travis County Master Gardeners and Daphne Richards and Wizzie Brown — Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

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The Compost Bin Submissions

We are always looking for Travis County Master Gardeners who are interested in writing for our monthly newsletter, and we would love to see your articles, photographs, book reviews and gardening ideas.

General Guidelines

- Please first email the editor to discuss potential article ideas.
- Email contributions as attachments (preferably in Word with a .doc or .rtf suffix).
- Please send images as separate attachments (preferably .jpg suffix). Don't forget to include photographer acknowledgments and captions.

Send your submissions, announcements, questions and suggestions to: editor.compostbin@gmail.com



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512-854-9600

"There is no season when such pleasant and sunny spots may be lighted on, and produce so pleasant an effect on the feelings, as now in October." - Nathaniel Hawthorne